

CLAIMS

1. An instant messaging computer program product operating in a first computer system attached to a network of computer systems, said computer program product including a plurality of processor executable instructions recorded on signal-bearing media, wherein said instructions comprise:

an incoming message function, said incoming message function receiving incoming instant messages from users of other computer systems attached to said network, said other computer systems attached to said network executing respective instant messaging applications, said incoming message function further informing a first user of said first computer system of receipt of said incoming instant messages;

an outgoing message function, said outgoing message function sending instant messages to said respective instant messaging applications executing in said other computer systems attached to said network; and

an availability reporting function, said availability reporting function reporting availability status of said first user to one or more said respective instant messaging applications executing in said other computer systems attached to said network, wherein said availability reporting function automatically infers whether said first user is available by accessing calendar data concerning said first user.

2. The instant messaging computer program product of claim 1, wherein said availability reporting function further automatically infers whether said first user is available from at least one indicium of availability from the set consisting of: (a) whether the first computer has received any input from the first user within a predetermined time period; and (b) whether the first computer is in a locked state.

3. The instant messaging computer program product of claim 1, wherein said availability reporting function accesses calendar data by calling a calendar application to access data stored in at least one calendar data file of said calendar application.

1 4. The instant messaging computer program product of claim 1, wherein said
2 availability status reported by said availability reporting function includes a reason for
3 inferring unavailability.

1 5. The instant messaging computer program product of claim 1, wherein said
2 calendar data includes normal hours of availability.

1 6. The instant messaging computer program product of claim 1, wherein said
2 calendar data includes events.

1 7. The instant messaging computer program product of claim 1, wherein said
2 network is the Internet, and wherein:

3 said incoming instant messages are received from an Internet server;

4 said outgoing instant messages are sent to said Internet server; and

5 said availability status is reported to said Internet server.

1 8. A method for performing instant messaging in a first computer system attached to
2 a network of computer systems, comprising the steps of:

3 receiving incoming instant messages for a first user in said first computer system
4 from users of other computer systems attached to said network, said other computer
5 systems attached to said network executing respective instant messaging applications;

6 sending instant messages to said respective instant messaging applications
7 executing in said other computer systems attached to said network;

8 receiving a request for availability status of said first user from an instant
9 messaging application executing in a second computer system attached to said network;
10 and

11 responsive to receiving said request for availability status, reporting availability
12 status of said first user to said instant messaging application executing in said second
13 computer system attached to said network, wherein said step of reporting availability
14 status comprises automatically inferring whether said first user is available by accessing
15 calendar data concerning said first user.

1 9. The method for performing instant messaging of claim 8, wherein said step of
2 reporting availability further comprises automatically inferring whether said first user is
3 available from at least one indicium of availability from the set consisting of: (a) whether
4 the first computer has received any input from the first user within a predetermined time
5 period; and (b) whether the first computer is in a locked state.

1 10. The method for performing instant messaging of claim 8, wherein said calendar
2 data is accessed by calling a calendar application to access data stored in at least one
3 calendar data file of said calendar application.

1 11. The method for performing instant messaging of claim 8, wherein said availability
2 status reported by said reporting availability step includes a reason for inferring
3 unavailability.

1 12. The method for performing instant messaging of claim 8, wherein said calendar
2 data includes normal hours of availability.

1 13. The method for performing instant messaging of claim 8, wherein said calendar
2 data includes events.

1 14. The method for performing instant messaging of claim 8, wherein said network is
2 the Internet, and wherein:
3 said incoming instant messages are received from an Internet server;
4 said outgoing instant messages are sent to said Internet server; and
5 said availability status is reported to said Internet server.

1 15. A computer system providing an instant messaging function, comprising:
2 a programmable processor;
3 a network interface connecting said computer system to a network of computer
4 systems;
5 a display for displaying information to a user of said computer system;
6 an incoming message function executable on said programmable processor, said
7 incoming message function receiving incoming instant messages from users of other
8 computer systems attached to said network, said other computer systems attached to said
9 network executing respective instant messaging applications, said incoming message
10 function further displaying said incoming messages on said display;
11 an outgoing message function executable on said programmable processor, said
12 outgoing message function sending instant messages to said respective instant messaging
13 applications executing in said other computer systems attached to said network; and
14 an availability reporting function executable on said programmable processor,
15 said availability reporting function reporting availability status of said first user to a
16 second user of an instant messaging application executing in a second computer system
17 attached to said network, wherein said availability reporting function automatically infers
18 whether said first user is available by accessing calendar data concerning said first user.

1 16. The computer system of claim 15, further comprising a calendar application
2 executable on said programmable processor, said calendar application generating at least
3 one calendar data file with respect to said first user, wherein said availability reporting
4 function accesses calendar data by accessing said at least one calendar data file.

1 17. The computer system of claim 15, wherein said network is the Internet, and
2 wherein:
3 said incoming instant messages are received from an Internet server;
4 said outgoing instant messages are sent to said Internet server; and
5 said availability status is reported to said Internet server.